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CANADA IN ACTION

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in action

DRUGS AND THE TRAVELLER

Allison, a Canadian student, was spending her summer vacation travelling in the Middle East. She met another student, fell in love with him, and the two travelled together for some time. At one point in their journey they had to take a ferry to pass from one country to another. Allison was travelling light so, when they reached their destination, her friend asked her to take some of his luggage through customs. Allison, of course, agreed. Her friend went through customs first, but Allison was stopped and her luggage was searched. Cocaine was found in the luggage that Allison was carrying for her boyfriend. She tried to explain that it was not her luggage but she was arrested just the same. Her companion had disappeared and she never saw him again. The authorities took a serious view of what they saw as an attempt to smuggle drugs. Allison was sentenced to seven years in jail. She appealed the sentence on the grounds that she was pregnant, but the appeal was disallowed, and her baby was born in prison. When the child was a year old, Allison was released on humanitarian grounds.

As Allison, in our story above, found out, drug smuggling is seen as a very serious crime in most countries of the world. From time to time, Canadian tourists are tempted by the potential profits to try a little drug smuggling themselves. Mostly, it's not worth the risk.

Traffickers like to use what appear to be innocent travellers to smuggle some of their drugs. The deal may start in Canada. Drug traffickers often work around Unemployment Insurance offices, or bus terminals; anywhere that young people down on their luck might be. The dealers offer large amounts of money to travel to the Caribbean or South America. All the traveller has to do is enjoy the trip and bring back a suitcase that will be given to him or her. The suitcase is, of course, full of illegal drugs.

Sometimes the contact is made outside Canada. These approaches may appear to be innocent. A little old lady might start a conversation in a restaurant. An attractive young woman might do the same in a bar. The elderly lady may talk about her sons or daughters who live in Canada. She may ask the traveller to take a small package back to Canada. Who can resist carrying a Christmas present to a grandchild? The present, of course, will turn out to be heroin or cocaine.

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And the attractive young woman in the bar? She'll explain she's learning to speak English. She says she would be happy to take tourists around her city so she can practise her English. At some point, the topic of taking something back to Canada will come up; a small gift for a nephew perhaps.

In some countries, there are people who sell tourists to the police. In a typical example, the tourist is asked to take a suitcase back to Canada. The luggage will be of a special make with a false bottom. The tourist buys the drugs at a price that will allow for enormous profits back home. The person who sold the drugs then tips off the police, who sit at the airport looking for that special suitcase. So, the drug seller makes a profit in two ways, by selling the drugs and then by selling the tourist to the police.

In other countries, the police themselves will set up the whole thing; the idea of entrapment being considered a perfectly normal way of catching "criminals." In these cases, an under-cover police officer will negotiate a drug deal with a tourist. Once the deal is completed arrest follows swiftly.

Not all these things happen in seedy, back-street bars. Sometimes the tourist is approached in a hotel lobby by perfectly respectable looking people.

Then, of course, there are those who take drugs in Canada. For these people, the best advice is don't travel. Arrest and detention in Canada is unpleasant, in many foreign countries it can be a terrible ordeal. You don't have to be a big-time trafficker either; in some countries, possession of even small amounts of drugs carry the death penalty.

Also, some Canadians do things in foreign countries that they wouldn't dream of doing at home. What harm is there, they argue, in smoking a joint in their hotel room? Again, tourists have to be careful that they aren't being set up. What are the odds that the minute they take the first pull on a marijuana cigarette the police won't burst into the room? How sure can the tourist be that the pusher who sold the drugs, didn't also sell information about the deal to the police?

There's also the problem of making a drug buy. Obviously, a certain amount of cash is going to change hands, and it's going to be done somewhere away from the bright lights. A tourist carrying plenty of cash in a dark alley is the near perfect target for robbery.

One thing that is very important is to take special care when crossing national boundaries. Being helpful and carrying someone else's luggage can end in big trouble. Another tactic of traffickers is to tape a package of drugs to the underside of a tourist's car. The package will be

retrieved by colleagues on the other side; that is, if customs officials don't find it first.

Whatever it is that they do that gets them into jail, most tourists will soon be in for a big surprise.

A large number of Canadians think that all they have to do is wave their passport under the noses of officials and they'll be let go. That just isn't so. When the reality of this sinks in, these Canadians get their second shock. Canadian consular officials can't get Canadian citizens out of jail. The only thing Canadian diplomats can do is try to ensure that people charged with a crime get treatment that is no worse than local people get. By Canadian standards, that treatment can sometimes be, at best, pretty rough.

The next thing that happens is the traveller learns that the criminal justice system doesn't operate in the same way it does in Canada. Prisoners may spend a year in jail before their case comes up for trial. When the day in court arrives, the prisoner learns that he or she may be considered guilty until proven innocent. In many cases, guilt by association is accepted. That is, a person doesn't need to be carrying drugs; it's enough just to have associated with a drug carrier to be found guilty.

The whole process can be a tremendous strain on the families of Canadians who are caught with drugs. The financial cost can be huge. There is the cost of travelling to the country concerned. Lawyers have to be paid, and in many countries bribes must sometimes be added to the bill.

Many countries hand out stern sentences for drug offences. In some countries, for example, part of the fine may be the estimated street value of the drugs. Paying this could wipe out a family's entire life savings, and there would still be the sentence to serve. In one Southeast Asian nation, two young Australian men recently paid the ultimate penalty for drug smuggling — they were executed.

The emotional cost of having a family member jailed in another country can be terrible. The strain of having a family member executed is impossible to imagine.

Jail conditions can be primitive by our standards. A jail in Asia, for example, was a converted stable that had been used by animals. The stalls had been equipped with bars. The only bedding was straw and the stalls were open to the elements. Four or five prisoners shared each cell.

Meals are often terrible; small portions of mouldy food are all the prisoners get. Edible food can be obtained but the prisoners will have to pay for it. Some things can be arranged if a payment is made — a better cell, better food, even a shorter sentence. But this can backfire as methods for making these arrangements vary by country,

tradition, and law.

Canadian consular officials can help, but they are bound by the laws of the country too. They can provide a list of reputable lawyers and keep in touch with family back home. But that's about the limit of what can be done.

The best approach is to be prepared when travelling abroad. Here is a list of do's and don'ts:

- Read up about the countries you are going to visit. Find out about local customs. For example, alcohol is strictly prohibited in most Muslim countries.
- Find out about local rules and regulations by contacting the embassies of countries you plan to visit. Some years ago, the streetcars were taken off the road in Hamilton, Ontario. They were sold to an east European country. A Hamiltonian, on holiday in that country, saw one of the old streetcars and tried to photograph it. He was arrested immediately. In many countries, everything to do with transportation — trains, streetcars, even bridges — is classified as a military installation.

- Be cautious of people who appear to be too friendly.
- Carry as little local currency as possible. Most of your money should be in traveller's cheques, whose serial numbers are kept separate from the cheques.
- If you are taking medication, carry a prescription with you.
- Ask for local advice about areas to keep clear of.
- If you are travelling extensively in one country, get in touch with the nearest Canadian embassy or consulate. Give consular officials details of where you'll be travelling.

- Wherever you are, obey the law. You are subject to the laws of the countries you are travelling in. Carrying a Canadian passport will not make you exempt from local laws and penalties.

Some of the don'ts to keep in mind are:

- Never cross a border *with* a hitch-hiker or *as* a hitch-hiker. Separate and meet on the other side. Though you may not be carrying any illegal drugs, it is dangerous to assume your companion is also innocent. If anything illegal is found by border officials, all occupants of a vehicle might be considered guilty. Establishing your innocence may not be possible.
- Don't travel with expensive luggage. This will only mark you out as a target. Always lock your luggage when you leave it anywhere; and it's best to replace the lock your luggage came with. The locks put on by suitcase manufacturers can be opened very easily without your key.
- Never accept gifts from strangers, and never carry anything through customs for someone else.
- Don't blatantly carry expensive camera or video

equipment. In many countries the assumption is made that all Canadians are rich. Flaunting your wealth will only attract attention.

- Never leave your passport, traveller's cheques, identification documents, credit cards, or tickets unattended. Also, never carry these things together. You risk being left without identification and funds in case of theft or loss.

- Don't be afraid to travel. Take some common sense precautions and you'll really enjoy your trips.

It's also important to realize that there are some things Canadian consular officials can do to help you; but, there are a lot of things they can't do.

- They can contact relatives and friends and ask them to send you emergency money.

- They can notify next of kin of accidents or deaths and let them know whether and how they can help.

- They can direct you to sources of information about local laws and regulations.

- They can tell relatives of your arrest and they can try to ensure that your hearing and detention meet the standards of the country you are in.

- They can try to ensure that you get fair treatment under local laws.

- They can provide a list of reputable local lawyers and doctors.

- They can help during emergencies, such as natural disasters or civil uprisings.

On the other hand:

- They can't pay hospital, medical, legal, hotel, or other bills.

- They can't cash cheques or provide loans.

- They can't make your travel arrangements.

- They can't provide legal advice.

- They can't set aside local laws if you are charged with an offence, or intervene in the judicial process of a foreign country.

- They can't post bail or pay fines.

- They can't hold parcels or personal effects for safekeeping.

- They can't provide translation services.

- They can't find you a job or get you a work permit.

- They can't help you get a driver's licence, visas to other countries, or residence permits.

- They can't search for lost items.

The most important thing that Canadians travelling in foreign countries can do is remember that the rules that apply at home don't necessarily apply in other lands.

However, it's safe to assume that every country, including Canada, takes a serious view of drug trafficking. And, recently, Canada has moved to boost the war on illegal drugs.

Nobody knows for sure exactly how many drug addicts there are in Canada, but there are a few reliable estimates.

The Addiction Research Foundation says that two million Canadians use cannabis at least once a year. The Foundation also estimates that 500,000 adults will take cocaine at least once in their lives. Government figures show that 3,500 people were hospitalized in 1982 for drug abuse.

But, the tragedy of drug addiction can't be seen in figures. It can be seen in the destruction of individuals, families and communities. It threatens safety in the workplace and on the highways. The economic costs are almost beyond measuring. A price tag can be put on the costs of law enforcement, criminal justice, social and health care. Even lost productivity can be measured. But how can you put a value on the creativity that will never be seen because a young life was ended by drug abuse?

The federal government has responded to the rising cost of drug abuse. It has launched a \$210 million campaign against drugs. The major objectives of the campaign are to cut the flow of drugs into the country, and to reduce the demand for them once they have crossed our borders. This second goal will be the most difficult to reach. The only way to achieve it is through public awareness and education campaigns.

Choking off the supply will not be easy either. More Canada Customs officers are being hired and trained to catch drug smugglers. Sophisticated equipment is being set up at airports and border crossings. One such detection device was recently installed at Vancouver's airport. Within 30 minutes it alerted Customs Officers to arrest a man who was carrying a large quantity of illegal drugs.

The Department of National Defence is getting involved. It will provide ships and aircraft to detect smugglers and prevent drugs from entering Canada along its coastline.

But the bulk of the anti-drug campaign will be handled by the RCMP. The Mounties will be working closely with drug intelligence units in Miami, New York, and Los Angeles. They will be helping provincial and municipal police forces by sharing intelligence and training local police in drug investigation techniques. In addition, the RCMP will be getting more funding and more officers to help its anti-drug campaign.

There will also be an expansion in the anti-drug profiteering program. Under this scheme, the government can seize any money convicted drug traffickers may have made from their drug sales. Since this program began in 1982, \$30 million in proceeds have been confiscated.

On an international level, Canada is giving increased support to anti-drug programs run by the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control. Canada plans to increase its financial help to the UN's anti-drug work to a level of \$1 million a year by 1991. Part of this program helps train police in other countries in detection methods and the handling of dogs that are trained to sniff out drugs.

Another part of the program is aimed at getting farmers to stop growing plants that are used to make drugs. In many developing countries, farmers may not be able to grow enough to feed their families. In this situation, they turn to growing marijuana plants, coca (cocaine), or poppies (opium); these plants are then used in drug making, and the farmers reap much better rewards than if they grew corn or rice.

So, the battle against drug abuse is fought on many fronts; help to drug source countries to get their economies in better shape so locals don't fall back on drug selling to survive; improved law enforcement in Canada and help for anti-drug campaigns in other countries; education programs to reduce the home demand; and, advice to Canadian tourists to use self reliance and common sense when travelling abroad.

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